

# The Role and Calling of an Evangelical Theological College in the 1980s

COLIN BUCHANAN

*This paper was given on 30 April 1979 as the inaugural lecture of the author as Principal of St John's College, Nottingham<sup>1</sup>*

## **Evangelical identity**

I would be untrue to my chosen title if I did not first reflect on the word 'evangelical'. I note that there is currently an 'evangelical identity problem' (to use Jim Packer's phrase) or an 'evangelical identity crisis' (to use Dick Lucas's). St John's College is, by its current Articles of Association, committed to having its teaching 'strictly Protestant and evangelical'. Where then, it must be asked, is evangelicalism in the Church of England to-day?

I would begin with two foundation points, one well recognized, the other usually overlooked.

1) Evangelicals have grown, and grown numerically in the Church of England over the last quarter of a century. From being a beleaguered and often despised remnant, they have become a major force. At the present time, almost fifty per cent of the men being ordained each year come from the evangelical colleges, and their numbers being ordained each year have grown absolutely over the last fourteen years whilst the total number being ordained in the Church of England has fallen by a half. I must be careful here. I once wrote in the church press that evangelicals are more 'numerous' now than they used to be, and the article was published in a form which asserted that evangelicals are more 'humorous' now than they used to be. I took some unnecessary criticism for that, though, for what it is worth, I am even prepared to abide by the misprint.

For the moment, the point is simply that the dynamics of being in a last ditch are very different from those of being in a strong position.

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In the last ditch you stand shoulder to shoulder, concentrate on essentials, and flourish on the sense that 'they' are against you. When you emerge in growing numbers from that last ditch and start going forward, then you tend to fan out, to lose contact, to indulge in secondary interests, and to forget the beleaguered sense which gave unity to the last-ditch stand.

It is my belief that this sketch depicts the moves amongst Anglican evangelicals over the last two decades.

2) The less recognized point is that the existence of a party is not simply the product of a doctrinal position. There has to be a doctrinal position, but it would never of itself produce a party. The non-theological factors of a common enemy—better still, a common persecutor instilling a shared persecution complex—and, along with that, symbols and banners under which to march: these give a party identity. It is perhaps worth noting that twenty years ago both these ran fairly strongly. Evangelicals assumed they would never be offered livings by any but evangelical boards of patronage; they assumed they would never be made archdeacons or bishops; they assumed that others would so dominate the revision of liturgy, the drawing up of new canons, the hammering out of relations with other churches, the whole future of the Church of England, as to make it difficult to accept any changes in prospect—and this gave them the last-ditch mentality. They stood by various biblical shibboleths—gently characterized by the credibility of Genesis and the edibility of Jonah—and they developed a series of quasi-masonic recognition symbols: north side, hood and scarf, leavened bread, and a whole series of liturgical identity-symbols; an ability to pray extemporarily, which culturally set them apart from all other Anglicans; and a series of social taboos, which meant that they could in fact recognize each other almost at sight in very mixed company. All these recognition-symbols added powerfully to the sense of identity.

The mistakes to which we are liable in seeking the key to evangelical self-understanding are to fail to recognize the effects of the rise in numbers, and to misunderstand the change in many of the non-theological factors which once gave the sense of being a party. Neither of these mistakes touches on the doctrinal question, and it would be possible that evangelicals have changed little in fundamental conviction even whilst their self-understanding has become more and more opaque. Let me spell out some of the consequences of the changes I have noted.

1) As the party has spilled out from the last-ditch mentality, many of its members have gone on to explore new frontiers and to engage with other schools of thought where the others actually are, and not simply where we would have liked them to be. Evangelical scholars working for the truth of the Scriptures have, by their very commitment to truth, been led into various restatements about various parts

of the Bible—simply because they were taking the rest of the world of scholarship head on. Others have taken other frontier stances in relation to applied theology, liturgy, ethics, and spirituality. Much of the distinctiveness from other Christians has dwindled in the process, and there has been a threat to our identity in that. But the threat is only a threat where the shoulder-to-shoulder last-ditch stand is *the* model of corporate identity which is treasured.

2) The rise in numbers has also led to a much greater involvement in the life of the Church of England in a period when there has been an unprecedented amount of central government going on in our church. This has required all kinds of responding to other people's agendas, amending other people's programmes, settling occasionally for the barely tolerable as at least better than the self-evidently wrong, and keeping company with sometimes surprising persons. I have myself been a frequent exponent of such brinkmanship in the field of liturgy, and was once also a joint author of *Growing into Union*, in which Jim Packer and I, with two well-known and very strong-minded Anglo-Catholics, both gave expression to consciences that could not find a way to accept a particular scheme for changing church relationships, and at the same time worked together on stating our doctrinal beliefs as a common shared theology, and not simply as two polarized views cynically joining together (like Hitler and Stalin in 1939) for some limited end. I think Jim Packer is slightly less than fair to *Growing into Union* when, in his own recent booklet, he calls this juncture one of 'co-belligerence'<sup>2</sup>; which does suggest the Hitler-Stalin parallel, rather than the striving to uncover a shared ideology which we came to suspect we might have.

3) We would also be unwise to ignore the changes that have come upon other parts of the church of God. One of the most obvious is in post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism. We seem nowadays to have on one side of us those for whom everything since 1962 in Rome is true to the revelation of God, and therefore to be welcomed and imitated; and on the other side those for whom nothing has changed at all since 1962, and, if there is any appearance of change, this is to be attributed to sinister purposes, to an intention to hoodwink and disarm us by purely cosmetic effects. But, they add, when we are clasped to Rome's bosom by this meretricious policy, then we shall learn the truth. I mention both these flanking attitudes, because it seems to me crucial that we should critically yet sympathetically measure what actually is happening in Rome and not get caught in any unthinkingly sweeping gut-level responses.

Nor are changes unique to Rome. I see some signs that the Church of England as a whole is marginally more biblical each year, and, of course, we have seen renewal of various sorts come in areas where it might have been little expected—this tends to include interest in the Bible even when accompanied by somewhat unsteadier elements of

experience-centredness. I also think that there has in the last two years been an unselfconscious shift at gut-level in the whole Church of England such as to make us *as a whole* more optimistic about God's working among us. It is a shift I have been measuring in terms of raising money, and it is seen in random disconnected bits of evidence from all over the Church of England, which together point to a renewal of faith and self-sacrifice.<sup>3</sup>

In many other ways, too, others are changing, and we cannot and do not relate to them in the confrontational or cold-shouldering ways which were once forced upon us, or at least seemed most natural to us. And if there is to be easier relating, then there also has to be a sense of humour—which alone gives a sense of proportion. As a matter of passing fact, I think that it is a sense of humour which has over the last twenty years so often kept evangelical Anglicans Anglican. Those who took themselves too seriously have always been in greater danger of seceding, because it takes *both* a tailormade ecclesiology *and* a sense of humour to live with the mixed church that *de facto* Anglicanism has been. So you see I am quite prepared to stick by the misprint I mentioned earlier. I think evangelicals, as they have emerged from the last ditch, have had to be, and have in fact been, more humorous than they used to be.

4 ) I should also observe that evangelicalism has been through its internal phases and transitions in the past decades. Without stopping on chronology, I note the great VPS and Inter-Varsity Fellowship era: a rootedness in the Bible, a narrowly defined simple gospel, and a pietism in relation to life as a whole. This was followed by neo-puritanism, with its emphasis on doctrine as a unitive logical whole, and its application to the whole of life. This was followed by the ecclesiology folk of the 1960s who, bred in the systematic tradition, wished to apply their theology to the church and their churchmanship. After them came the charismatics, in an unexpected swing away from logical thinking and policy-creating to a new emphasis on the immediacy of God, the actual experience of the Spirit, and a revivalist atmosphere of worship. I have attempted elsewhere to do some evaluating of this movement—a movement which has meant so much to the life of this particular college in the 1970s. It has had its own effect on the sense of evangelical identity: apparently putting frontiers between evangelicals where none had been before, whilst equally ignoring previous frontiers in the joy of a shared experience even with Roman Catholics. But I am not here evaluating: I am pointing out that if I name four tidal movements of the last twenty-four years or so *within* Anglican evangelicalism, then it is likely that each has, as they say, 'peaked' at intervals of about eight years or so from the previous one. This tends to mean that people whose spirituality and outlook derives from any one of these movements may, with difficulty, understand the movement which is next to it, but have much greater diffi-

culty in coping with a movement two or more peaks away. Each gave birth to its successor with some pain, and crossing that pain barrier more than once is not easy. Hence again, in this highly volatile, far from set and solid, evangelicalism, there is ample opportunity for those of one era to misunderstand a succeeding one, and bewail a loss of identity because things are not as they were.

If I may venture one footnote to this analysis, I would add that the charismatic movement is far past its own peak in Anglican evangelicalism, and the question for the 1980s is what particular emphasis will prove to be mounting to its peak in the coming few years.

5) We note in passing the loss of not only the persecution complex, but also the quasi-masonic recognition-symbols. There are now no taboos which unite evangelicals and differentiate them from others: a wariness of the weed of the tobacco plant is the nearest to a residual taboo. There are no distinguishing liturgical emphases left. And the semi-spiritual, semi-cultural ability to pray aloud extemporarily is again no longer distinctive.

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So we are driven back to see whether there remains a doctrinal position which, even if it is not buttressed by these non-theological factors, remains both distinctive of evangelicalism, and academically proper as a rallying-point. I detect that the affirmation of the supreme authority of Holy Scripture to declare the will and mind and word of God to his people can still be made, although I also note that some who would affirm it might still be prepared to accept many propositions about the literary character of the books of the Bible and about their authorship which would have horrified their spiritual forebears. It is also possible to find those who would hesitate to affirm the foundational statement about the Bible, but might prove cautious, reverent, and conservative in their actual handling of the text. I myself would want to recast traditional statements in a different way, and ensure that evangelicals had a positive—indeed a high—doctrine of tradition as the context, the ecclesial context, within which the supremacy of Scripture had to be asserted. There are, therefore, many imprecisions on the frontiers of definition. But I believe that the difference between evangelicals and others can still be charted in general terms—as, for instance, the difference between the Shropshire plain and the Welsh hills can be discerned in a general way—without that observation of itself giving any indication where the actual political boundary between the two may lie. Sometimes it goes up into the hills, sometimes it spreads out on to the plain, and features which look as though they are one side of the boundary are found to be formally on the other. We would expect a large body of people who have given themselves not solely to entrenching them-

selves behind frontiers, but also to manoeuvring and skirmishing over and around them, to have come up with slightly disturbed frontiers, without in general altering the location of their own territory. My problem with John Stott's definition at NEAC two years ago was that it claimed evangelicals as men of the Bible and of the gospel, without recognizing the difficult thing we were all facing—the problem of delimiting boundaries. I have begun to see that we perhaps ought to recognize that difficulty and then live with it.

### **Principles for theological colleges**

If I now turn from the analysis and ask what this implies for a theological college, then I must restate some general principles which are to take us into those 1980s. These are:

1) *The primacy of Scripture* I happen to believe that a series of events have conspired to give us an inadequate view of Scripture. We have inherited a century and more of being suspicious of tradition, and viewing it as an enemy of the truth, rather than as a vehicle of the truth. The result is that history has become easy to ignore, and this in turn has catered for superficial approaches to Scripture, bran-tub styles of hermeneutics, and latterly an interest in modern forms of 'prophecy': *not* because they apply the Scriptures forcefully to us, but because they may save us the trouble of knowing the Scriptures at all. If we expect God to give us his primary word by direct utterance, when he has already decreed to give it to us by the written Scriptures with which the whole church, the particular fellowship, and the obedient individual disciple have to wrestle, then we are chasing a will-o'-the-wisp and dignifying it with the name of a well-lit path. I say 'if'—for I describe a tendency rather than a clearly defined disorder. But Scripture *is* primary, and nothing must take us from that to the sinking sands of subjectivism.

2) *The discipleship of the mind* A college, whatever else it is, is a place of learning. 'Learning' has become a much wider concept in theological education than the stuffing of minds with facts and arguments: we now view ourselves as training and forming men and women in their entire persons for the kinds of ministry they will exercise. But that wider concept must not obscure the narrower one. The church of God is engaged in ideological warfare for the hearts and minds and wills of nothing less than the whole human race of this generation and of generations to come. We are considering how tomorrow's leaders can be equipped for this warfare. At the very least it requires the devotion to ideology, the bending of all the powers of the mind that a man or woman may possess, that a convinced Marxist would evince. There are other demands far beyond what a Marxist might accept—for instance, a duty of practical love—but they do not lessen this demand or provide an excuse for evading it. A theological

college is a stake driven into the ground on behalf of the kingdom of God, as a permanent token that the devil and all his ideologies are to be hounded with all the God-given powers that we possess.

3) *A professional staff* It follows from the previous considerations that a college must be staffed to serve its stated purposes. Staff members must be professionals, both in the sense that they have specialist knowledge and disciplines to impart, and in the sense that they fulfil their role not through some accident or mischance, but because there are in this calling those elements which the world would call a 'career'. No doubt it is fully rounded people who are needed, in order to model in their own lives that which they teach; but there must be no doubt of the commitment of their minds to the theological task, and thus in turn the college's structures must foster and encourage this commitment by its staff. One further question, with which I am keen that college staff should grapple, is how they should function together—in what I call a 'centripetal' way—in their theological thinking and exploring, provoking, stimulating and enriching one another. The larger the staff, the more specialisms which can be accommodated and brought to bear upon the whole: but equally the harder the task in holding a theological fellowship together.

4) *A forward-looking institution* I note that at primary school my daughters learned virtually all weights and measures in metric. Why? Because the country is sensibly committed in its educational system to ensuring that the citizens of tomorrow will be equipped with the tools of tomorrow. This can give rise to some tensions for today, particularly if I, representing a fuddy-duddy world of yesterday, insist on measuring things in feet and inches. And here is a model for a system of theological education. Can we instil into today's ordinand those tools which he will need tomorrow? Can we foresee sufficiently the shape of ministry to come for which to equip him? Indeed (for here we have more responsibility than the primary schools) can we ourselves start to shape tomorrow's church in such a way that the forms of training follow naturally from the prospect which we not only discern, but actually help to create? Some of the more specific issues, to which I shall shortly turn, spring from this projected dynamic relationship with a church which is yet to be.

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I would like at this point to break off, and do some more measuring of where we have already gone. To do this, I have gone back to an article written by my good friend Jim Packer in 1968.<sup>4</sup> He was reviewing the first of the many reports on theological training which the colleges have had to digest (and frequently resist) over the last eleven years. It was the only one not apparently produced under economic

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pressure, and it is helpful to revert to it. Jim Packer adds his own *desiderata*, and these too are seminal. It is known as the de Bunsen Report. Its major recommendations were as follows:

- a) If possible, colleges should be university-linked.
- b) The number of colleges should be reduced, and the size of them increased. One hundred and twenty was suggested as a good size for educational purposes.
- c) Churchmanship distinctions should continue to be observed.
- d) Post-ordination training should be so standardized that it could be integrated with pre-ordination training.
- e) Ordinands and non-ordinands should be trained together.
- f) Married men should have wives and families with them, and wives should be afforded some chance to do some theological training.
- g) The colleges should be more closely linked with Church House.
- h) If necessary, financial sanctions should be applied to close down colleges which failed to respond to recommendations.

To these Jim Packer adds the following:

- i) There must be an end of hierarchical college principals running colleges on preparatory school lines.
- j) There must be more concern, in any reforms, with the content of theology.
- k) He raises smaller footnotes about ecumenical training and co-educational training.

I think that those who hear this list read out, nearly eleven years after it was put down on paper as an unrealized dream, will be amazed how far the particular recommendations have been realized in many colleges over the intervening years. Indeed, the list includes items which are now taken entirely for granted. The 1970s have been a time of bold changes in the colleges, and here is a yardstick by which to measure many of them. It is clear that if we stop for one minute to peer into the 1980s, yet it is but a brief stop. A college is a fast-changing animal, and it is important that it changes in accordance with a clearly discerned vision and thoroughly established starting principles, and does not merely accommodate itself to the particular secular or bureaucratic pressures or fashions of its times. It is heartening to see that recent developments, such as those we have implemented at St John's, have in fact had this character; it is important to see that those of the future do.

### **What is a theological college today?**

In the assumptions about training in 1968, you will hear the echoes of a style of training which dominated for nearly 100 years. The concept was of a monastic retreat from the world, where a 'family' of around

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forty single male Anglican ordinands lived to read and pray with a staff which was composed of a principal and three curates. Each college would have varied from this in some respects, but all colleges showed enough of the features for the picture to be built up. Now that has virtually all ceased. What style of community is to be developed from where we are? Apart from producing a professional staff, a large community, a mixture of men and women, married and single, graduate and non-graduate, ordinand and non-ordinand, Anglican and non-Anglican, old and young, English and overseas—what other directions are to be pursued?

The first training need in a changing church is to have this openness to the future. I summarize this to myself in a parody of the old prayer of Alcoholics Anonymous: 'Lord, give us the tightest possible grasp of the fundamentals, the loosest possible sitting by everything else, and the wisdom to tell the difference.' Along with the central theological disciplines, all other training must exhibit its own provisional nature, and must train men and women in adaptability and openness to change. We cannot expect to instil the 900 separate pastoral skills parish A will require from its new deacon, nor the 192 mechanical and technical ones asked by parish B. But if we model here a sense that true ministry requires learning and adapting, then we shall inculcate not skills but character.

However, the parodied prayer itself sets up a tension about a learning community. How can we simultaneously be a community of faith, indeed of a committed evangelical faith, *and* a place of open enquiry and honest scholarship? Are not the conclusions to all enquiry written into the premises in such a community? The commitment of the intellect must allow of scholars that they tread paths which the 'founding fathers' (if I may so misdescribe Alfred and Keziah Peache) would have deplored. The honest mind must be able to put *everything*—yes, Christianity itself—back into the melting-pot. And yet the community is a community of faith, not just a collection of enquirers. It is better to live with this tension unresolved than to try to solve it; but it is a tension and must be understood. We shall look to believers as though we were taking unbelievable risks with our faith, whilst simultaneously appearing to secular scholars as men and women with a stultifying commitment hampering all our alleged intellectual enquiry. So be it: we only ask that all, internal and external, recognize that this is going on within us.

Secondly, I revert to a point already made, and to which I shall revert yet again later. It is that we really are training for the future. We have to identify the role of the ordained ministry in the future, and prepare students for that. I put it to you that there will be an accredited leadership, for which ordination will be the appropriate recognition and appointment, which will nevertheless have to be non-clericalist and non-authoritarian. There is still a hope in high places of

carpeting England with just enough parochial clergy to keep the old parish system going. Whether or not that hope is fulfilled probably depends upon whether or not the numbers being ordained each year to the stipendiary ministry do in fact rise to the 450 for which the House of Bishops' resolution and the Archbishops' Pastoral Letter in 1978 have called. If so, then an average service of thirty years for those who continue in parochial ministry (and this is an unidentified proportion of the total ordained, but it might be 70%) would bring us near to the 10,000 parochial clergy which would keep the system going. But whether it remains or goes, it is clear that it cannot stay as it has been. The clergy of the future will have to be creative leaders: giving an input of vision, being theologically resourceful persons, being overseers of the work of ministry done by the whole local church, indeed being mini-bishops (though not, of course, mini-prelates). And if those clergy are to give a lead in the life of a changing church in the 1980s and 1990s, then we dare not simply be content with preparing students for a static ministry in which they take too much responsibility for the welfare of the local church as it is, and insufficient responsibility for helping to clarify what it is to become.<sup>5</sup> The future is always bound to be stretching a long arm into the present, if we only know where to look for it. And thus it is possible for men to be ordained to fairly traditional—and clericalist and defensive—parishes, and yet treasure hopes and ideals which may serve them in later spheres. They have to live with a tension, and they must not feel wholly suicidal in the face of today's church.

Thirdly, the residential community has certain values of its own. It is, of course, only an ephemeral community. It only exists in its entirety for thirty weeks of the year, and even in those weeks the very styles of training to which we are addressing ourselves prevent too tight and cosy a huddling. Yet residence together has great value. I note that the part-time courses do not now want to call themselves 'non-residential': for they do go into short-term residence together, and those times of residence are very fruitful periods.

What then are the values of the residential community? Obviously, it is the best context for sustained study for many, many students. Obviously, it provides a more constant form of pastoral oversight, with more frequent contact between tutor and student than any other form of training. Obviously, such a community draws together many resources which (as I hope to show) have many other uses for the benefit of the church. But I also suggest that a community of faith is a glimpse of something our culture does not otherwise know: that is, men and women trying to bring the whole of their corporate life to the touchstone of faith in the living Christ. This sense that God is in the whole of life is something which all other communities have lost under the secularizing processes of the centuries. The colleges have always had indirectly in view the need to model this community-of-

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faith concept. The local churches, which are far behind this in most places, should be given some sense of it from those who have experienced it for a period of training. I do not say there is no need of other experiences—there certainly is. In a college, neither staff nor students should become so institutionalized that they are incapable of making the break. But there should be *something* in them—a whiff of heaven, if I may be so bold—which, once breathed, will never enable its breathers to rest content with anything less thereafter.

I must make myself very clear here. I do not think the ‘full-time’ training institutions—the residential colleges—have any monopoly of the right to train ministers. There is a need for many people to continue in their present jobs and train near their present homes. The colleges should have no stakes in trying to preserve a monopoly to which they are not entitled. We only have to urge that there is still a place for ‘full-time’ training—which you would certainly expect your doctor, your psychiatrist, your social worker to have had—and that one of the values in that training is the modelling of a shared Christianity, a wrestling with living by faith corporately. It is something which has been tested in the St John’s community this year by the need to raise money on the one hand, and to cope with death at close quarters on the other.<sup>6</sup> These have both been community events in a way that is unimaginable in other forms of training. But, at the same time, colleges should not be protected from other sorts of competition; and, provided that choices can be made on the basis of actual circumstances and needs, I am glad that the part-time regional courses are now permitted by the House of Bishops to prepare men and women for stipendiary ministry.

Fourthly, the staff have a need to model a non-hierarchical style of leadership. We have to earn the right to teach, not assume it from our place in the structures. We have to be clearly willing to learn—not pontificating from a height. We have to be open to criticism and advice—not proofed from it by the steel fence of a bogus professionalism. We have to let our humanity show, with no frantic covering up of our weaknesses. We have to share with students in partnership in running the college. We have to be open and accessible and approachable because we are these other things. We have to be so not only because in fact the community runs better that way; nor only because parish leadership will require these same attitudes from those who train here and reflect in years ahead the ways they were trained. Both these reasons are good ones, but we have to be so because the gospel itself forbids us to lord it over the Lord’s people. I am half-amused and half-horrified to find it stated in Roger Lloyd’s history of the Church of England that colleges need ‘the right principals to rule over them’.<sup>7</sup> I read in the history of St John’s that in Dr Gilbert’s time at Highbury ‘students were told to “work hard, play hard and pray hard”’, and the principal saw to it that, as far as was in

his power, they did all these.' 'Many a man'—the account goes on—'not playing a game was obliged to accompany the principal for an afternoon walk if caught loitering in the corridors.'<sup>8</sup> The whole ethos of this is unimaginably far distant from the 1980s: not only because today's students are not presumed to be playing games each afternoon; nor to be shirking playing games if found 'loitering in the corridors'; nor only because the principal would have great difficulty in organizing himself into an afternoon walk; but particularly because the idea of thus 'obliging' students, reflects a hierarchical pattern from which we do our best to escape.

Fifthly, there are particular areas of training which are surfacing, perhaps in reaction to patterns of the past, perhaps giving us hints of the emphases and fashions to come. There are two of these: both loosely linked by coming within the sphere of what is called 'spirituality'. Both involve getting to know ourselves better as a means of getting to know God better—and thus give rise to the obvious point that self-knowledge is one of the greatest gifts a college can impart to a student.

The first of these is self-discipline. If there is little external discipline upon people in training, then a mature self-discipline is needed. The emergence of evangelicals from cultural taboos and other patterns of quasi-legalism has been accompanied by a sense of liberty which is always in danger of antinomianism, and a sense of the Christian life being a matter of continuing joy, which is always in danger of producing 'fair weather Christianity'. What, then, is the place of the nitty-gritty determination to walk uprightly before God, cost what it may; to discipline one's day, whatever the temptations; to undergo suffering and rejection, if that be the path laid before us; and to grow through winning battles (yes, and battles they may well be) in this area? I doubt if there are any short cuts, and we must hold the cross as dear as the Spirit. There will be no spiritual leaders without this.

The second is the area of contemplation. I can only report that we see at St John's a struggling awareness that all is not well with our tradition in respect of systematic prayer. We recognize a growing need to lay the masters of spirituality of all traditions under contribution. And the luminous reality and immediacy of God—in which we revel, though not, I trust, too naively—will impose a firmer and firmer *de facto* supernaturalism upon us, the more we find our way in these varied paths.

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The interesting result of these emphases is that our staff do not, as it were off their own bat, train the students. When the Bishops' Inspectors visited St John's in November 1978, Canon David Welan-

der commented to me: 'I see what is happening here—the community trains them.' I find that to be not just a description of what is happening, but a charter for the years to come.

### **Some relationships**

I turn now to the external relationships of a college. Many theological colleges are, of course, in close proximity and relationship to a university department of theology, and this provides both a challenge and a contrast. The challenge of academic standards and of the pursuit of truth, is obvious. The contrast between teaching theology from a secular platform to secular students, and teaching theology from faith to faith, is easy to summarize in an unfairly polarized way. Neither end of the polarization is as fully at the end as the cartoon would suggest. There remains an objective difference between syllabuses, vocational expectations of students, and the pastoral oversight of the whole person in the course of teaching. While a college may suspect that theology cannot be a wholly secular subject, the university may suspect that open-ended enquiry cannot be made from a starting-point of commitment to a historic faith. There is scope for friendly encounter in this area, and each institution needs to be aware of changes in the other, whilst retaining its distinctive features in the contrast.

On the other side, the relationship of a college to the church is a very demanding priority. Colleges are independent institutions, and ideologically this puts them at risk. There is an articulate theory which says that, as with overseas missionary service, theological training is a function of the church and ought to be part of the church's structures. Lest this argument go by default, it is timely to spell out certain matters on the other side.

1 ) There is an ecclesiology which tidily subsumes all the church's activities under its structures of bishops, priests and deacons, synods and parishes. It is this tidy ecclesiology which itches to own and control all the church's activities. But it is worth noting that this is very far from an exhaustive account of the church's activity. There are hundreds of resource agencies—the Mothers' Union, home and overseas missionary societies, Bible societies, youth movements, publishing and bookselling societies, church architects, musicians' resource centres, charitable trusts, patronage boards—which are independent of the structures and yet in living and constructive relationship with them. Indeed, much of the actual forefront of initiatives in the church has always come from the voluntary banding together of Christians who passionately share a common concern, and cannot wait for it to be implemented and adopted by the structures. The colleges exactly exemplify this in their history.

2 ) Granted this justification for an independent institution, it will be clear that, in a comprehensive church, the only way for an institution

to be in any distinctive way evangelical is for it to be independent. There is some impatience around about still making such distinctions as 'evangelical' in the church today, but you will recognize that I for one am still convinced that there is a distinct evangelicalism in the Church of England, and that it is appropriate for there to be evangelical institutions which both serve the whole church and conserve the distinct tradition. They ought, of course, to be at the forefront of reforming their own tradition, in vigorous reforming dialogue with their own past. But, for a comprehensive church to *be* comprehensive, by definition it must have particular different entities within it for it to comprehend. Evangelicalism, whilst it claims in essence to be right-minded Christianity *simpliciter*, yet within a comprehensive ecclesiology claims its place by virtue of being a definite brand of Anglicanism.

3 ) It is crucial that an independent institution which is indirectly funded by central funds, and is directly responsible for preparing ministers to function within the structures of the church, should be answerable and accountable to the central authorities who provide the money, and to the bishops who ordain those who complete the training. But that accountability should also exist towards the church at large. To us this entails an openness, by which we are ultimately governed by an Association, and the accountability there is enough to make us careful about our stewardship.<sup>9</sup> Colleges ought to advertise all their posts, and be open about the candidates (as is inevitable if, for instance, those candidates are going to meet students when visiting the institution for interview). There is scope for others to take their place on college councils, representing the dioceses in the area, the university, ACCM, and General Synod. Staff and students should have their place on councils, and share in the lesser committees. The constitutional accountability should be complemented by a sheer openness in which the world may come and look, and see a college's weaknesses as well as its strengths.

4 ) But independence has another role to fulfil. It does not fix the college's position in the church, but leaves it free to develop its role of supporting, sustaining and nourishing the life of the church in a flexible way. On the one hand, the independence guarantees the national and international role which we have come to value very highly: on the other, it still enables us to place our weight locally where it is desired and needed. Thus we find our own level according to need, and we are not imposed upon anybody. Our independence also represents a prophetic role towards the church. When the ecclesiological map is drawn, the existence of independent theological voices represents the voice of prophecy addressing itself to the church, being with it and of it, but not owned by it. And that lays upon us the responsibility to be unafraid to lead the church and not to follow it, to challenge the church and not to soothe it, to pioneer and

to take risks for the sake of our Lord. If we fail in this respect, we might as well surrender our independence and ask that we may be governed from the centre, smoothly disgorging a sort of grey consensus theology.

\* \* \* \*

Colleges are resource centres for the church, locally, nationally and internationally. The gathering together of staff, premises, reference libraries, etc. have clearly functions to fulfil under God which are over and above our main *raison d'être*. We are used to the idea of premises being used for conferences in vacation time, but there is now a widespread diversification in trend. Colleges are uniting part-time training with full-time, forming links with colleges of education, working at in-service training, and using their institutions in varied ways. If we add in the rapid development of pastoral studies in the 1970s—a development in which St John's was in the van—then it is clear that the colleges have become resource centres for the church far beyond the confines of training men for the ordained ministry.<sup>10</sup> It is clearly appropriate that such developments should occur as God gives the vision and the means for them to do so, and it is part of the rationale of a senior independent institution not to resist or imperiously take over more youthful independent enterprises, but to nurture them, relate to them, and work with them for the promotion of the kingdom of God.

### For the future

One dares to wonder what more the 1980s can bring. I think it lies in this area of developing diversification, and I cheerfully go out on a limb to sketch developments which would be, if not inevitable, at least highly desirable, and in continuity with the rationale I have been developing.

Firstly, we ought to develop theological scholarship. My own dream would be of having research students in what at Oxford was called a 'middle common room', and of having a better than 10:1 ratio of resident staff to students. All the colleges have existent theological abilities which are not being deployed as the pressures of work are too great.

Secondly, we ought to develop the conference-centre prospects of the resources we have. What a complement it would be to existing colleges if their grounds could accommodate, say, another residential building which could be in use in term-time for weekend conferences. Or suppose we had furnished houses available for married clergy to come with wives and families for in-service training. Suppose that our libraries provided the natural place for men and women to write theologically. Suppose our staff included those training others in Chris-

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tian journalism, evangelistic writing and artwork. Suppose our open-walled stance, by which the church and the world constantly penetrate into the college, and the college is daily open to the world and the church, became the servant of the church in the sense that we could provide any theological or pastoral servicing for which we were asked.

Suppose, again, that travel was a yet more fully developed feature of college life than hitherto. Suppose a college could itself plan to send members of staff (and research students too) on varied trips round nations, not only in order to minister, but also in order to learn. Suppose colleges were to epitomize in their own communities those principles of interdependence between western nations and the Third World to which we pay warm lip-service. Suppose college staff members from overseas were able to have periods teaching on our staffs. We cannot, of course, suppose anything without money: but it is clear that we have to budget for a resource-centre with diverse functions, always drawing its initial strength and sense of purpose from its training men (yes, and women too) for that stipendiary leadership of the churches which is in continuity with the intentions of our founders. But, granted that, with faith and vision and energy, with the good hand of a good God upon us, we have work to do which we can still but dimly discern, but for which we must gird ourselves daily.

And then suppose that these actual residential students, the heart of a college's life, went out year by year raising the overall standard of ministerial life and witness and effectiveness. Suppose that the colleges took their place in the ministerial understanding of the resources available to the church. Suppose that our open-walledness led to a free coming and going which would aid congregational life, and enrich us that we might enrich others. Suppose, then, that this sense of an ideological battle for the world gripped the minds of us all. Under that good hand of our good God, would we not see his church advancing and the fight of faith being won?

**THE REV. COLIN BUCHANAN** is Principal of St John's College, Nottingham. He is also a member of the Liturgical Commission of the General Synod of the Church of England.

### NOTES

- 1 The opening two paragraphs, omitted here, were preliminaries paying tribute to my predecessors and pointing out that I stood within the newly-built addition to the college chapel—i.e., where none of my predecessors had stood.
- 2 J. I. Packer, *The Evangelical Identity Problem: An Analysis* (Latimer House: Oxford 1978) p 3.

## CHURCHMAN

- 3 In the original lecture I added here that these disconnected bits of evidence were what had convinced me in early 1978 that we could erect new buildings by public appeal, which by the time of delivery of the lecture were almost complete, and almost paid for.
- 4 J. I. Packer, 'Re-tooling the Clergy Factories', *The Churchman*, 82: 2, 1968, pp 120-24.
- 5 In the original lecture I added that we do not in fact train students for 'a Church of England that does not exist', for there are many parishes now which are preparing for the 1980s and 1990s and providing models for us.
- 6 The reference to money is to the appeal mentioned above (note 3), and the reference to death is to the sudden demise of Robin Nixon, the previous principal of St John's, six months earlier, and the death of a student wife in the weeks just before the giving of the lecture.
- 7 Roger Lloyd, *The Church of England, 1900-1965* (SCM: London 1966) p 76.
- 8 G. C. B. Davies, *Men for the Ministry: The History of the London College of Divinity* (Hodder and Stoughton: London 1963) p 79.
- 9 The 'Association' method of government, pioneered by Dr Jim Packer during the short time (1970-71) he was principal of the old Tyndale Hall, and continued at Trinity, Bristol, after that, has at St John's enabled the council to be elected from an 'Association' of friends and sympathizers some hundreds strong. The council has to report to the Association, so no high-handed irresponsible action can be undertaken without accountability. This contrasts with the method of government previously used in these colleges, and still practised elsewhere.
- 10 In the original lecture I went on to list here some of our own developments (as, e.g., in the area of extension studies, in the existence in relation to our structures of a bookshop, a publishing house, and the Shaftesbury Project, and in many other ways).